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SUBJECT: SCENESETTER FOR FOREIGN MINISTER STUBB'S VISIT TO
WASHINGTON MAY 11, 2009

REF: A. (A) 09 HELSINKI 150

[1](#)B. (B) 09 HELSINKI 151

Classified By: CDA Michael A. Butler for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY. Finnish Foreign Minister Stubb arrives in Washington as the Finns enjoy considerable international acclaim for their efforts in international crisis management, not only as a result of their effective Chairmanship of the OSCE last year, but also for the award of the Nobel Peace Prize to former President Martti Ahtisaari. The Finns seek ways to showcase their comprehensive civilian-military crisis management policy, and Afghanistan provides a litmus test for that approach. Generally the Government aims to maintain current levels of international participation, though earlier this year it approved increases on military, civilian and development contributions in Afghanistan. Stubb also has called for a re-thinking of Finland's and the West's relations with Russia as their eastern neighbor undergoes significant change driven by the global economic downturn.

[1](#)2. (C) SUMMARY CONTINUED. Stubb's visit provides an opportunity to thank the Finns for their important work in Afghanistan, the Balkans, and most recently within the OSCE, and to (1) encourage Finland to continue to play a constructive role in promoting peace and security through Euro-Atlantic and other international institutions; (2) urge the Government to fill promised contributions and commit to increased future military, civilian and development assistance to Afghanistan; and (3) urge Finnish leaders to publicly support a common U.S.-EU policy on Russia. Stubb is spearheading Finland's campaign for a UN Security Council Seat for 2013-14, and may seek to enlist our support. END SUMMARY.

Political Overview

[1](#)3. (SBU) Our relations with Finland are excellent. Prime Minister Matti Vanhanen and his Cabinet share responsibility for the implementation of Finnish foreign policy with President Tarja Halonen. Vanhanen leads a center-right governing coalition that has placed high importance on working through the EU and on improving Finland's partnership with NATO and its overall relationship with the United States. Foreign Minister Alexander Stubb hails from the center-right cabinet member that most vocally supports strong transatlantic ties. While Stubb does not hide his support for Finland's eventual NATO membership, he publicly hews to the GOF's policy that despite a "strong case" favoring membership Finland will remain in the Partnership for Peace during this government's tenure (ending in 2011). (NOTE: President Halonen has ruled out seeking NATO membership during her term, which ends in 2013. END NOTE.) Stubb, as Chairman-in-Office in the OSCE, helped broker a cease-fire in Georgia last August and - unusual for a Finnish leader - condemned the action, albeit as OSCE Chair.

Comprehensive approach to crisis management

14. (C) Finnish participation in international peacekeeping operations dates back to the Sinai in the 1950s. The Finns describe their approach to international crisis management as comprehensive, seeking to utilize all resources - civilian and military, public and private - to best advantage. The GOF maintains an international military presence in key locations, including Afghanistan (110) and Kosovo (440), and aims for an overall civilian participation abroad of 150. The Finns' approach encounters considerable domestic constraints. Owing to a deeply entrenched notion that in war (including two against Russia during World War II) the Finns have always stood alone, Finland devotes the vast majority of military resources to territorial defense, with only a relatively small amount for crisis management operations. The GOF spends EUR 100M/year to support the roughly 700 troops abroad; it has proposed an increase of EUR 50M/year, intended to maintain current levels.

Increasing in Afghanistan Comprehensively

15. (C) Afghanistan, where the Finns have provided military, civilian and development assistance since 2002, presents the Finns the opportunity to demonstrate their commitment to their comprehensive approach. After a period of policy deadlock, in early 2009 the GOF approved plans to temporarily double its military contingent (to 210), located at the Swedish-led PRT in Mazar-e-Sharif, in support of the upcoming

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presidential elections; to increase participation in Operational Mentoring and Liaison Teams; and to double its contribution of civilian police trainers to EUPOL (to 18-20).

Finland also will increase development assistance by 1 million euros per year, reaching EUR 16M/year by 2013. We welcome those increases, though they are relatively modest compared to the contributions of their Nordic neighbors, particularly on the military side. Stubb likely would acknowledge the political challenge within the GOF and the Parliament in securing further military increases. In the absence of additional military contributions, the Finland should fill promised slots and exploit untapped civilian expertise beyond police trainers, e.g., in building government institutions.

A new approach to Russia

16. (C) Russia is Finland's largest bilateral trading partner and its primary energy supplier, and Finns are proud of the way they have managed their relations with Russia through the Cold War and up to the present day. That management typically involves careful public statements by government officials calculated not to provoke. Stubb wants to change that style, and he spearheaded the GOF's adoption in April of a "Russia Action Plan," a set of realistic guidelines to govern relations with its neighbor (REF A). The Plan recognizes the importance for Finland that Russia have an open democracy, a modernizing economy and stable social conditions, and it envisions cooperation without the usual practice of sidestepping challenges and deficiencies on the Russian side. Stubb does not limit his call for new thinking to Finland, evidenced by his comments at the March 4 Transatlantic dinner in Brussels, seeing in Russia's ongoing transition an opportunity for improving relations with the West. (NOTE: President Medvedev made his first visit to Finland in April (REF B), and met President Halonen (Stubb met with Foreign Minister Lavrov). Prime Minister Putin visits Finland later in May. END NOTE.)

Central role for the EU

17. (C) As the most public supporter of Euro-Atlantic institutions in the GOF, Stubb also strongly supports the EU's central role within Finland's foreign policy. The Russia Action Plan calls for promotion of bilateral relations as well as active development of the EU's policy towards Russia. Having placed such importance on the EU, many Finns have become critical of and frustrated with its performance. Stubb has said that the EU's dependence on Russia for energy provides leverage over Russia the EU has not utilized. The Action Plan notes Russian frustration with, and interest in exploiting, EU policy incoherence and internal differences. GOF officials also have criticized the EU's lack of strategic vision on Afghanistan, being more distracted at the highest levels by mundane tasks like counting the number of civilian experts.

BUTLER